

Part 1 – Islam’s Problematic Origins

I) Introduction – S2.V Spread

In 570 AD, a child destined to shake the world of faith and empire took his first breath in the desolate desert of the Arabian Peninsula. Born into one of many Arab clans in a land of animists and idol worshippers, the child Muhammad rose to found one of the three great monotheistic religions and an empire that, by the 18th century, touched three continents.

Islam, like Christianity, expanded across the Mediterranean and Asian regions, but did so in a very different manner...by the sword rather than spreading a Gospel of forgiveness and reconciliation with God.

Since Islam’s inception in roughly 600 AD, Muhammad’s message has risen to dominance in a band of nations stretching from Southeast Asia through the Middle East and into Southeast Europe and Northern Africa. There are roughly 2 billion Muslims globally, and given Islamic families have the world’s highest birth rate, their numbers are expected to increase to 3 billion by 2060. They will account for one-third of the world’s population and eventually exceed Christianity as the largest religious group. While already preeminent in a diversity of states to include Iran, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Indonesia, Egypt, Turkey and Algeria, Islam’s presence is growing steadily in the West, to include the United States.

- A.) Since 2000, the Muslim population in America has tripled from 1.6 million to 5 million
 - 1) They’ve formed significant population centers in several states and in major cities...of the roughly 9 million people in New York City, 1 million are Muslim.
 - 2) The UK has a population five times smaller than the U.S., yet it has 4 million Muslim residents; they make up 15 percent of London’s population and carry outsized influence throughout the country
- B.) What does Islam’s expansion mean for the world of faith? Can Islam co-exist within secular and Christian nations in the West? How should Christians respond?

- 1) We will answer these questions over the next few weeks as we explore Islam in three sessions – **S3 Overview**
- 2) I won't hold back...I will address the good, the bad and ugly of this topic
- 3) However, while it's tempting to focus on what one could view as the negative aspects of the West's "Islamization," for the Christian, the spread of Muslim peoples offers a unique evangelism opportunity
- 4) Most, if not all Muslim lands lock out the Gospel or at least suppress it; however, now they're coming to us in a land where religious speech, discussion and debate are protected
- 5) Try to view individual Muslims as a mission field whom God wants to reach rather than invaders to be hated; remember, Jesus said we are to love even our enemies
- 6) My hope is that this series will equip us to do just that; to courageously and graciously stand against this destructive worldview while loving the individual Muslim
- 7) Tonight, I want to address the story of Islam's beginnings: we'll look at the cultural context of Muhammed's life, his personal spiritual journey, and the early framework of Islam

II) Background

- A.) To track Islam's spiritual roots, we go back in history about 4,000 years to the time of Abraham
- B.) In Genesis chapters 12 to 22, we see God promises the patriarch several remarkable things:
 - 1) He shall be the father of many nations, and the world will be greatly blessed through his descendants; his first child will be born of Sarah, who was barren, unable to conceive

- 2) His descendants will possess the land of Canaan and from there, great kings will rule and the world
 - 3) He will be considered the father of the faithful – the first of Yahweh's chosen people – **S4 READ Gen 17:4-7**
- C.) Abraham and his wife Sarah wait for the promised child 10 years, but no baby yet; Sarah is 75 years old at the time, and is well beyond the normal age range for conceiving; so the pair decide to give God a helping hand

Gen 16: 1-4 - *Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had not been able to bear children for him. But she had an Egyptian servant named Hagar. So Sarai said to Abram, "The LORD has prevented me from having children. Go and sleep with my servant. Perhaps I can have children through her." And Abram agreed with Sarai's proposal. So Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian servant and gave her to Abram as a wife. So Abram had sexual relations with Hagar, and she became pregnant. But when Hagar knew she was pregnant, she began to treat her mistress, Sarai, with contempt.*

- D.) Any child born this way was considered the offspring of the lord and his wife (not the surrogate) and was made the family heir
- 1) This was not God's intent — I believe God delayed the promise so there would be no doubt that Isaac's birth was miraculous and a product of God's purposeful election; but the pair grew impatient and took things into their own hands
 - 2) David Guzik writes in his commentary on Genesis 16, "Whatever a man or woman attempts to do without God will be a miserable failure or an even more miserable success.
 - 3) Abraham and Sarah's plan accomplished precisely what they intended: Abraham fathered a son; but their act was an incredibly successful failure; it introduced near- and long-term suffering into their household and into their descendants' future
 - 4) It bred conflict between Sarah and Hagar, Sarah and Abraham, and between Ishmael and the true son of promise, Isaac

- 5) In Genesis 21, the tension rises to a level that forces Abraham to push Hagar and Ishmael out of his household
- E.) Now, as the drama plays out, key facts arise that help us understand the background of Muhammed and his people – **READ S5 and S6, 6a**
 - 1) This describes the Arab people groups who have wandered the desert areas south and east of Israel for centuries
 - 2) It also explains the incredibly stubborn resolve of the region's Islamists who would rather see their nations burned to ash than to make peace with the so-called infidel
 - 3) This was Ishmael's spiritual and cultural legacy; a legacy that shaped the Arab world into which Muhammed arrived in 570 A.D.

III) The Early Years

- A.) Muhammed was born in sixth century Mecca, a bustling religious and trading settlement nestled in a barren, mountainous valley of western Arabia – **S7**
- B.) Mecca was a sanctuary space where tribes agreed not to fight one another so they could safely trade for needed goods and pay homage to their gods
 - 1) **S8 image** - Mecca was home to the Kaa'ba, a black cube structure that housed hundreds of images of clan-specific gods, spirits and ancestral figures; Allah was considered the supreme god, but most Arabs didn't consider him interested in the affairs of men
 - 2) The Bedouins' religious beliefs were diverse, but most believed men had no eternal destiny, and there was no divine moral code or eternal judge who held men accountable for harming one another
 - 3) The Quran refers to this period as *Jahiliyah*, the "age of ignorance;" it was essentially a Darwinian society – survival of the fittest – the strong often acquired resources by raiding, looting and destroying the weak

C.) Muhammed's early life in this rough-and-tumble world was one of tragedy: his father died before he was born, his mother died when he was two, his grandfather died when he six

1) Fortunately, his uncle Abu Talib, a successful merchant and member of the powerful Quraysh tribe who ran the city, adopted him and made him a merchant's apprentice

a) As he aged, he became a successful merchant leader in his own right thanks to the support of his wealthy, previously widowed wife Khadija

2) During this time, Muhammed was exposed to what I believe are two primary shaping forces

a) He likely witnessed the practice of slavery, the killing of female infants, the oppression of the poor, and frequent inter-tribal warfare

b) Further, he was exposed to Jews and Christians who lived on the Arabian Peninsula or who interacted with Meccan merchants along trade routes – **S9 Discuss**

1) Their influence on Muhammed is clear; the Qur'an, for example, contains 25 references to Jesus, and Muhammed declared Friday – the day Jews prepared for the Sabbath – a holy day

III) Spiritual journey and visitations

A.) According to Muslim scholars, Muhammed's spiritual journey was sparked by the region's lack of a coherent religious ethic that would prevent the abuses he observed

1) He favored the monotheism of Judaism and Christianity, but supposed encounters with the angel Gabriel convinced him both religions were corrupted and needed refinement

2) This first revelatory encounter took place at the Cave of Hira, located near the peak of Jabal al-Nour northeast of Mecca – **S10.V Gabriel**

- 3) The video spotlights the dramatic contradictions in the messages Gabriel delivers to Mary and to Muhammed; one or the other messenger is a deceiver because God cannot contradict himself
- B.) The question is which one – the Bible’s Gabriel or the Quran’s Gabriel - is the deceiving spirit?
- 1) For me, the answer is clear: Gabriel’s messages to Daniel, Zechariah, and Mary align perfectly with prophecies about Jesus repeated for 1,500 years in Jewish history - **S11, S12**
 - 2) The message given to Muhammed was the first of its kind, and not aligned with a single prophecy or teaching before it.
- C.) Secondly, the nature of Muhammed’s revelations is much different than those recorded in the Christian Scriptures
- 1) For one, no divine messenger in the Bible ever violently assaulted a human; any touching was used to comfort and strengthen
 - 2) For example, when the prophet Daniel is struck sick during a heavenly vision, the angel’s gentle touch revives him and brings him to his feet
 - 3) Other prophets were deeply shaken by their sense of moral unworthiness in God’s presence; but again, were comforted; at no point did they suffer lasting psychological distress
- D.) Secondly, no angelic visitor was sent to revise long-standing revelations of God’s will and character; messengers reinforced what was already revealed or clarified details; they never contradicted or overturned settled truth
- 1) To say our biblical text needed correcting was to say that God failed to keep the Word uncorrupted as it was passed down through the generations...Paul tells us otherwise in 2 Timothy 3:15-17 (*supervision*)
 - 2) No angel ever contradicted or reimagined the Old Testament to a verify the New; their words were a confirmation the New’s continuation

E.) Thirdly, Muslim biographers record Muhammed experienced strange mental and physical symptoms when receiving revelation

- 1) After his initial encounter, Muhammad, feared he was possessed by a *Jinn* (a spirit) or had lost his sanity; some traditions claim he attempted to throw himself off a mountain cliff
 - a) Individuals under demonic influence experience intense profound dread, deep emotional distress and a desire for self-destruction rather than spiritual clarity or peace
- 2) Symptoms from subsequent revelations include snorting like a camel, his face turning pale, experiencing great bodily heaviness, excessive sweating, emotional trauma, and the unnerving sounds of bells or buzzing bees
 - a) In historical texts on demonology, possessed individuals frequently display involuntary vocal alterations; these include guttural animal noises, roaring, growling, or heavy respiratory choking
 - b) Classic signs of spirit possession across diverse cultures frequently involves sudden facial flushing, localized temperature spikes, profuse sweating, and erratic movements.

F.) Further, Muhammed had to turn to his wife to find relief from his emotional trauma; she, in turn, referred him to a cousin, Waraqa ibn Nawfal, to validate his revelation as divine

- 1) In contrast, recipients of biblical revelation found all the courage, reassurance, and authority they needed from the messengers and the God who sent them; they needed no human comfort or validation

G.) Finally, critics focus on Muhammed's initial response to his calling; the event at Cave Hira left Muhammad in a prolonged state of confusion, a period known as the *Fatra*—a months-long silence where Muhammed feared God had abandoned him

- 1) Biblical prophetic calls, by comparison, are characterized by immediate operational clarity; there was no confusion or ambiguity, and the prophet knew precisely where he stood with God and what the call was
 - 2) In other words, when God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, Moses knew immediately what they were, what they said, and what he was supposed to do with them
 - 3) When God revealed Nebuchadnezzar's first dream to Daniel, the prophet immediately understood it and informed the Babylonian king of its meaning
 - 4) Jonah knew precisely what his call was and he knew who God was
- H.) Given the evidence here, it seems clear that what Muhammed received were not divine revelations; and this isn't just from a Judeo-Christian perspective...his experiences align with multi-cultural understandings of dark, spiritual activity

IV) Synthesizing religion

- A.) Another major issue is evidence that shows Muhammed adopted, altered and reimagined long-standing beliefs of existing religions to form Islam; in other words, Islam is a synthesis, a merging of other beliefs
- 1) Long before Muhammad began preaching, Arabia and its surrounding regions were home to Jewish communities, Christian churches, ancient Arabian religious traditions, and cultural influences from the Persian world.
 - a) These traditions developed extensive teachings about God, creation, prophecy, morality, judgment, and the afterlife.
 - 2) Historians and scholars can show numerous connections between these earlier religious traditions and the teachings of the Qur'an – **S13.V Bits**
 - 3) German Rabbi Abraham Geiger states Muhammad incorporated elements of Jewish belief and history, often transmitted through oral traditions

- 4) In Geiger's opinion, Muhammad adopted Jewish ideas concerning God's unity, divine judgment, religious morality, and sacred history
 - a) And in some cases, simplified them, altered details, combined stories, or changed their emphasis to fit his own prophetic message
- B.) Scholars Gabriel Said Reynolds and Sidney Griffith emphasize the Qur'an borrows Christian-oriented stories sourced outside the Scriptures; in other words, it adopts Christian folk tales (baby Jesus talks, clay birds)
- C.) Scholar Angelika Neuwirth wrote the Quran joined the centuries-long struggle between Jews and Christians for ultimate Abrahamic authority; Jews claim he is their ethnic and spiritual father; Christians claim he is the spiritual ancestor of people who live by faith in Christ
 - 1) For example, in the Koran, Surah 2:124-129, Abraham and Ishmael together found God's most sacred house, the Kaaba
- D.) Other scholars note Muhammed continues ancient Arabian pilgrimage practices, requiring trips to worship at the Kaaba, but changes it by forbidding worship there of any god, but Allah
 - 1) Islamic religious literature also displays parallels with Persian/Zoroastrian traditions concerning judgment, paradise, and the afterlife – S14

V) Conclusion

- A.) So we see here there are several elements that present Islam's origins as problematic
 - 1) Its spiritual origins begin with Ishmael; a lineage that carries a nature that resists God's spirit of grace that came through Isaac and ultimately Jesus Christ; this is why Islam stubbornly sets itself against the Gospel
 - 2) It starts with visitations by a spirit that claims to be Gabriel, but contradicts earlier visitations recorded centuries earlier in Scripture; the being specifically targets the divinity of Christ and the Trinity

a) Subsequent revelations afflict Muhammed with experiences commonly attributed to demonic activity

3) Finally, Muhammed's theology is primarily a synthesis of existing religions, but with significant adaptations and alterations; further Muhammed seems to develop his theology based frequently on his personal experiences and desires, then attributes them to Allah

B.) I think, at best, Muhammed was sincere in his desire for religious and cultural reform, but his heart was not open to God's true revelation; I believe he desired to be at the center of a movement...to be the face of change and the power of change; thus, he was open to deception

1) His decision-making in the formation of Islam is comparable to modern-day Marxism; adherents use existing rules, change the rules, ignore the rules, or make new rules

a) They do whatever it takes to get power and force society to bend to their vision; while their vision may seem to champion the downtrodden, ultimately, it's about empowering the cause and those who lead it

b) Such movements tend toward violence because not everyone wants to get on board; we'll see this violence flare up in Islam soon after Muhammed starts making disciples to his new religion

C.) Next week, we'll look at Muhammed's earliest teachings in Mecca, his escape to Medina, his violent return to Mecca and how his newly formed movement expanded, and today threatens to overwhelm the West.